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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001935

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2011

TAGS: PREL PHUM NI WCAR

SUBJECT: POLICY CHANGE ON WCAR KNOWN AT FOREIGN MINISTRY

REF: ANDREWS/LANIER E-MAILS 08/03/01

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter, reason 1.5(b/d)

¶1. (C) Acting Polcouns met August 3 with Deputy Director of the Second United Nations Division (SUND) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Ibrahim, in the absence of Director Akinsanya, now in Geneva. SUND has primary action for the WCAR within the Ministry. Ibrahim said that SUND and the Ministry generally were "well aware" of President Obasanjo's "U-turn" on the WCAR. Although careful to say that he had seen no formal instructions (he had just returned from a conference, and did not normally handle WCAR issues), Ibrahim said that Geneva "must" have been told to follow Obasanjo's policy position. He also acknowledged that Obasanjo's decision to substitute UN Ambassador Arthur Mbanefo for the GON's Geneva representative for the WCAR Prepcom in Geneva was "well known" within the Ministry and, he assumed, had been communicated to the concerned parties.

¶2. (C) Ibrahim said that the Ministry was in a state of "shock" over Obasanjo's decision to jettison support for reparations for colonial-era slavery. "This has been our position for ten years," said Ibrahim in a tone of considerable disappointment. "We should not drop it overnight." Ibrahim suggested that the GON would find itself "very isolated" within the Africa group on WCAR, and GON relations with other African states would be harmed by this sudden turn-around. "This is something we should approach gradually," he said. "We should work with our neighbors," he said, to change how Africans dealt with the issue. But, said Ibrahim, "He (Obasanjo) is our President, and he has made his decision."

¶3. (C) Comment. We were not able to confirm the actual transmittal of instructions to Geneva on WCAR. Although Ibrahim's comments make it clear that the MFA understands from basement to roof that Nigeria's long-standing position has suddenly and drastically changed, USDEL may wish to consider an early approach to Ambassador Mbanefo. He is frequently in direct contact with President Obasanjo and would be the best channel to exploit at this time in order to elicit vocal Nigerian support for removal of offensive language on all relevant issues. Early engagement would also help forestall any attempt by unreconstructed members of the Nigerian delegation to work quietly against the new policy.
End comment.

Jeter